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SUBJECT: UNRWA BRIEFING HIGHLIGHTS USD 55.7 MILLION IN NEW NEEDS, HINTS AT INCREASED ISRAELI COOPERATION ON HUMANITARIAN ACCESS

REF: AMMAN 2999

Classified By: DCM GREG BERRY, PER 1.5 (B) AND (D).

11. (C) Summary: On July 2, UNRWA Deputy Commissioner General Karen AbuZayd briefed donors on UNRWA's USD 55.7 million in new financial needs following the March-April military operations in the West Bank and Gaza. UNRWA warned that its 2002 emergency appeal remains severely underfunded, with pledges of only USD 53.2 million of the original USD 117 million appeal. Without significant new contributions, UNRWA warned that it will be unable to implement emergency programs after September 30. UNRWA also reported that it has seen signs that Israel may be attempting to resolve the agency's longstanding humanitarian access difficulties; following meetings with IDF and MATAK officials (held at their request), UNRWA finally received permission to deliver to Gaza 42 tons of medical supplies that had been held at UNRWA's Jerusalem warehouse for the last 22 months. UNRWA West Bank Director Cook also reported that MATAK has asked UNRWA to institute regularly scheduled meetings to resolve such disputes. While our interlocutors found the news encouraging, some skeptics questioned the Israelis' motives -- especially given recent Israeli government statements critical of UNRWA. End summary.

12. (U) On July 2, UNRWA Deputy Commissioner General Karen AbuZayd briefed donors in Jerusalem and Amman on UNRWA's USD 55.7 million in new financial needs following the March-April military operations in the West Bank and Gaza. AbuZayd was accompanied by West Bank Director Richard Cook and Gaza Deputy Director Kris Nordahl, who provided detailed updates on the humanitarian situation in their respective fields. Regional refugee coordinator and refugee assistant attended the Amman briefing.

GRIM FINANCIAL PICTURE

13. (U) Deputy ComGen Karen AbuZayd reported that UNRWA's original 2002 emergency appeal remains severely underfunded, with pledges to date of only USD 53.2 million of the original USD 117 million appeal. Without significant new pledges, she warned, UNRWA will be unable to implement emergency programs after September 30. Due to both limited financial resources and the curfews and closures in the West Bank, UNRWA has been able to implement only 22 percent of its job creation programs, one-third of its community works programs, 28 percent of its emergency health programs and one of its two scheduled food distributions in the West Bank. In Gaza, UNRWA's short-term employment programs can continue through October, but the agency will be unable to distribute emergency food assistance after September.

MADE STILL WORSE BY ADDITIONAL NEEDS

14. (SBU) In a supplemental appeal issued on June 20, UNRWA reported that it faces USD 55.7 million in additional financial needs resulting from the March-April military operations in the West Bank and Gaza. The majority of these new needs, some USD 28 million, is required to rebuild Jenin refugee camp. West Bank Director Cook reported that these reconstruction expenses (which include infrastructure and administrative support costs) should be covered by a still unconfirmed USD 30 million pledge by the UAE. (UNRWA still is negotiating with the UAE over the expenses that will be covered by the donation. The UAE insists that only construction costs should be covered, while UNRWA is pushing for social services costs as well.) Other significant new needs include USD 6.9 million in additional shelter reconstruction in Gaza; USD 2.5 million in West Bank shelter reconstruction and repairs outside Jenin camp; USD 2.4 million in non-Jenin infrastructure repairs in the West Bank and USD 1.25 million in additional emergency food aid for the West Bank.

SITUATION IN WEST BANK "VERY, VERY DIFFICULT"

15. (SBU) UNRWA West Bank Director Richard Cook told donors that although the intensity of fighting had diminished in the

West Bank, the situation is still "very, very difficult," as the West Bank is undergoing the "tightest, most intense and prolonged closure" UNRWA has ever known. Due to daily IDF incursions and curfews throughout the West Bank, it is nearly impossible for UNRWA's 4,200 Palestinian staff to move around the West Bank or report to the Jerusalem field office. Cook added that the 392 Jerusalem permits required for UNRWA's West Bank field office staff still have not been renewed. Nevertheless, an average of ten staff per day manage to reach the field office from the West Bank, in violation of Israeli laws and at great personal risk. To manage operations without those who are unable to reach Jerusalem, UNRWA has set up internet workstations in some of its West Bank installations, enabling employees to telecommute where possible. To lead convoys and conduct food distributions, the West Bank field still is relying on 12 international drivers provided by the Swedish consulate.

16. (SBU) Cook said the continued closures are affecting "every aspect of life" in the West Bank. Although UNRWA had made plans to extend the school year by 10 to 30 days in the West Bank, to make up for the tens of thousands of teacher days lost to closures, the continued tight closures and curfews are making it impossible for teachers to reach their schools. In response to a donor question, Cook said that UNRWA probably will be able to make up for lost classroom time in the next school year -- assuming the school year proceeds without significant closures or curfews -- but that the lost classroom time will have a significant, unrecoverable effect on students if such disruptions continue beyond this summer.

17. (SBU) In the health sector, Cook reported that the continued closures are having a particularly difficult effect on refugees with chronic illnesses such as cancer, kidney failure or heart disease who require regular treatments. In the last seven days of June, for example, 33 of UNRWA's 34 West Bank health centers were closed for at least one day. UNRWA also is coping with an increased number of refugees in need of physical therapy. Cook reported that 80 refugees resident in the West Bank are in need of life-time physical rehabilitation care following the March-April incursions, including 46 in Jenin camp.

JENIN CAMP UPDATE -----

18. (SBU) Due to the continuing problems of unexploded ordnance (UXO) and ongoing IDF incursions into Jenin, UNRWA's reconstruction efforts are proceeding slowly, often only at three to four-hour intervals per day. At this rate, and without the necessary UXO removal equipment (ref), UNRWA estimates that it will take at least nine months to remove all of the rubble from Jenin refugee camp. In the meantime, a total of 35 Palestinian refugees have been wounded and two killed by UXO since mid-April.

GAZA CONTINUES TO DETERIORATE -----

19. (SBU) UNRWA's Deputy Gaza Director Kris Nordahl reported that the humanitarian situation in Gaza continues to deteriorate. 215 Palestinians have been killed in Gaza since March 1, and the demolition and bulldozing of Palestinian refugees' property continues. 516 Palestinian refugee shelters have been demolished since September 2000, including 418 families still in need of new shelter. From early March until early May, the Gaza Strip was trisected by Israeli checkpoints and 750 UNRWA employees were unable to report to work. As a result, the Gaza Men's and Women's Training Centers were closed for 60 days. UNRWA's medical specialists (cardiologists, ob/gyns and ophthalmologists), who work in clinics throughout Gaza, also were unable to work for 60 days. Now that Gaza is only bisected by checkpoints, UNRWA staff and Training Center students are able to move through the Strip, although it can take four to seven hours to make a one-way journey. Nordahl reported that UNRWA's food distribution program was severely delayed by the closures, as UNRWA was not allowed to import commodities until May 29. Due to the internal closures, UNRWA still is not allowed to distribute food to the impoverished southern al-Mawasi enclave. Nordahl reported also that Gaza's already weakened economy deteriorated still further following the March-May closures, as even internal construction projects Gaza ground to a halt. UNRWA has increased its selective cash assistance in Gaza by 45 percent to combat growing unemployment, and seeks an additional USD 1 million in emergency funding to further increase this assistance.

SOME SIGNS ACCESS MAY BE IMPROVING, BUT PROBLEMS REMAIN -----

10. (C) UNRWA reported that it has seen some signs that Israel may be attempting to resolve the agency's longstanding access difficulties. During the week of June 24, former MATAK commander General Spiegel met with UNRWA officials as

part of the Israeli Government's ongoing review of IDF actions during Operation Defensive Shield. West Bank Director Richard Cook reported that Spiegel listened carefully to UNRWA's complaints, took notes, and made no attempt to argue or defend IDF actions that violated UNRWA's immunities or mandate. UNRWA's regular IDF liaison and the MATAK West Bank Commander then followed up with separate requests for briefings and regularly scheduled meetings with UNRWA officials. Cook told donors that he has had more contact with MATAK and the IDF in the last few days than he had had during his previous five years of service in the West Bank. He also reported that, as a result of these meetings, Israeli authorities finally granted UNRWA permission to deliver to Gaza the 42 tons of medical supplies held in UNRWA's Jerusalem warehouse since September 2000 due to Israeli security restrictions. In Gaza, although UNRWA continues to have internal distribution and staff access problems, UNRWA reported that Israeli authorities have opened Sufa crossing exclusively for UNRWA containers. According to Gaza Deputy Director Nordahl, the Israelis have not allowed any other organization to import containers into Gaza.

11. (C) While our interlocutors at the briefing found the reports of increased Israeli cooperation on humanitarian access issues encouraging, some skeptics questioned Israeli motives -- especially given recent Israeli government statements critical of UNRWA. Following the briefing, for example, one host country representative speculated to refcoord that perhaps the Israelis were easing restrictions on UNRWA as part of their master plan to displace Arafat -- as it would be impossible for the Palestinians (and Israel) to weather such a political crisis without a fully functioning international relief system.
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